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SIPDIS

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BAGHDAD FOR ECON, POL, NCT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PNAT](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SULAY STUDENTS VIEW ELECTION THROUGH KURDISH EYES

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Students from Sulaymaniyah University met on May 24 with IPAO to share reactions to the formation of the national government. The twenty-six students equally represented men, women, and both younger students from a variety of departments and older students attending graduate level courses in the evening program. The majority believed Kurdistan should be independent and, drawing a parallel with recently independent Montenegro, welcomed federalism as a necessary first-step. Students also praised Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's policy statement for raising the Kirkuk issue, and asked for clarification of the U.S. stance on the 2007 referendum. Action request: see paragraph 8. End Summary.

Students React with Nationalism, Hope, and Skepticism  
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¶2. (SBU) Of the twenty-six Sulaymaniyah University students IPAO met, the majority reacted to the new formation of the Iraqi national government in Kurdish-nationalistic terms. One responded "How can we feel anything about the formation of the Iraqi government when we are not Iraqi - we're Kurds." Another said: "We are obliged to live as part of Iraq however it is our simplest human right to be on our own if we want to be."

¶3. (SBU) The majority of students echoed the independence sentiment, referencing the recent referendum in Montenegro as a model for Kurdistan to follow. One student said that even as part of a federalist state, they do not consider themselves as part of Iraq. She suggested that the U.N. and the U.S. should support Kurdistan as an independent state, providing protection from hostile states.

¶4. (SBU) The students expressed distrust over the appointment of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, suggesting that as a member of the Dawa Party he would not support the needs of the Kurdish Region. Several students asked for transparency on the part of the U.S. in regards to the U.S. stance on the Kirkuk issue and Kurdistan's independence.

Federalism Provides Hope  
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¶5. (SBU) An older Kurdish student from Baghdad said that although most Kurds believed they "deserved independence" because of their bitter experiences with the regime of Saddam Hussayn, he felt, however, that federalism was the best solution for Iraq at this time. He said that Iraq was currently split into three regions with three separate agendas and the formation of the government was a positive step towards balancing them.

¶6. (SBU) A political science student added that the Kurdish people had voiced their support for the new situation in Iraq by participating in the election. Further, the KRG was benefiting

from its relationship with Baghdad through pressure for greater transparency and freedom of the press. He felt the Kurdish Coalition had successfully brought new Kurdish faces to Baghdad, particularly technocrats who could resolve the issue of Kirkuk to the satisfaction of the KRG. For this, he reasoned most Kurds were optimistic about the new government and welcomed it.

#### Kirkuk - Promising Resolution of Article 58

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¶17. (SBU) Students praised Maliki's policy statement to the Council of Representative, which included a point asking for the resolution of Article 58, the referendum on Kirkuk in 2007. They asked to what extent the U.S. supported the return of Kirkuk to Kurdistan and expressed anger over the unchecked Arabization policies of the Sadr and Dawa parties. They said Arabs who had left after Liberation were now being paid \$2,000 each to move back to Kirkuk and resettle, reverting the city back to pre-Liberation population ethnic divisions.

#### Comment and Action Request:

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¶18. (SBU) The level of Kurdish nationalism expressed by the students was to be expected, however much could be done to broaden perspectives on Iraqi politics. The dialogue was very productive and the students freely discussed controversial opinions. The student activist groups in the Kurdistan region are more likely to reflect popular beliefs and sentiments towards issues such as Kurdish independence or the U.S. presence in Iraq than Kurdish government officials, who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Post requests Baghdad support in encouraging official visitors to the north to make visits to university students a priority. End Comment and Action Request.

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